MEETING OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF EVANGELICAL CHURCH OF ITALY.

October, 1895.

The 21st General Assembly of the Evangelical Church of Italy took place, from the 29th of october to the 2nd of november, 1895, in Florence, in the old Roman Catholic Church of San Jacopo, for more than twenty years transformed into an Evangelical Church, with the adjoining building occupied as Schools, Pastor's dwelling and other departments of the Mission.

The Assembly was opened on Tuesday, 29th october, at 8 p. m. by the Rev. Santi Stagnitta, Pastor in Pisa, with an eloquent sermon from Col. I, 16, insisting on the true patriotism, which should never be unaccompanied by faith in true Christianity, as it was illustrated in the lives of Gavazzi, Mazzarella, Desanctis, as well as of the Italian Reformers and of the Precursors of our own Reformation.

At the close of worship, the Commissions of the Churches appointing their Deputies to the Assembly were verified by the President. Rev. Lodovico Conti, pastor in Rome, was elected President, and Rev. Giuseppe Silva, Pastor in Milan, Vice-President, and for Secretaries, Messrs Lenzi of Palermo and Marini of Turin were chosen.

As will be easily understood, there was this year a huge mass of work to be got through, and thanks to the excellent division of the labour among the members, it was all brought to a happy end.

The Assembly of this year has a special importance, both because the Church celebrates its first quarter of a century of life, but also because enemies led by some who were with us, but were not of us, have rushed upon the young Evangelical Church of Italy, this very

year, trying to destroy it, but in vain, for it has come out of the trial, thank God, stronger than ever. New Pastors and new Evangelists have taken the place of those who are no longer with us. New localities in the south of Italy have opened to the Gospel. At *Margherita di Savoia* we have lately had conferences attended by above 300 persons. At *Riesi* more than 100 persons have invited us, and we have there flourishing schools and a promising Church. The Lord has evidently given us new blood and new life. Notwithstanding all our difficulties, he has given again occasion for pronouncing that sweet word, Progress.

The report of the Committee of Evangelization was full of encouraging facts, and finished with these words: " As long as there is an Italian to convert to Christ and to His Gospel, the Mission of the Evangelical Italian Church has not yet been accomplished. Courage and forwards always! At the cost of dying of hunger, if need be, forwards in the name of the Lord!"

Pastor Silva, speaking of the sufferings of the Church in Milan, applied to the brethren there the words written by the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians, 4 chapter! The two lay representatives of that beloved Church described to us how and how much the members had suffered, on account of him who had deceived them, and still further deprived them of their place of worship, not belonging to him, nor to the denomination which he had entered, but to Mr. W. C. Iones, who had desired by a legal document, that it should only serve for the worship of the Evangelical Church of Italy, formerly, the Free Church of Italy. The work in Bologna, Bari and Mottola is carried on amid encouragement.

The Treasurer, Dr. Mac Dougall, gave us good news of the state of the funds. He assured the Assembly that his sympathy for the Evangelical Church of Italy had never diminished. He had never dreamed of forsaking it, but only experienced the greatest difficulty with the old Committee. " The Evangelical Church of Italy," he said, " is a native Church. The problem of native Churches is the great missionary question of the day — how to evangelize by means of the evangelized. Why should we not allow liberty of action in Italy, to the converts from Roman Catholicism to evangelize their native land? We who are Protestants born should

help them with our sympathy, but we ought to leave them free to work as they think best."

The public gathering called " Festival " was a beautiful one. It was a real festival of gratitude to God and to the Benefactors of the Church, who have aided it during twenty-five years of ecclesiastical life. The Assembly presented a lovely, framed *pergamena* with a suitable inscription and a Medal in gold to Rev. Dr. Mac Dougall, as a souvenir of a quarter of a century's loving help, and our Congregation in Rome also gave to this generous Friend a commemorative Medal in silver. Dr. Mac Dougall was greatly moved and had scarcely words to express his grateful feelings, and said that really they had already given him so many proofs of affection that this appeared to him too much.

The Rev. George A. Giddins, Secretary of the Evangelical Continental Society of London spoke, and said that he had taken part in their Meetings with the liveliest interest and was glad to see their real " esprit de corps." He added that he had come among them, expecting to find himself in the presence of death, so widespread were the evil tidings in England, but instead he had found vigour and life. He continued to observe that if the Evangelical Italian Church had been called an infant, it must have been a healthy and robust infant, to have known how to pass through its ordeal of suffering so victoriously. He ended by exclaiming in excellent Italian: " Long live the Evangelical Church of Italy ! "

Mrs. John Hopkins, the President of the American Society, in aid of the Evangelical Church of Italy, expressed her great joy in being with us, she, who on account of her love for Italy was called by her friends Madame Italy ! She too had believed in the reports of the breakdown of the Evangelical Church of Italy, when instead the cause was more flourishing than ever. " America is far away, and it is difficult at that distance to hear and see what is doing here. " Her first good impression of the work was received at Turin, where she found our school so prosperous, and now she was greatly touched by the brotherly and united spirit in which all the work of the Assembly was conducted.

Unforgettable are the words of the German Pastor in Florence, Rev. Gustavus Fischer. " The trial has

humbled you, and made you more united than before. Continue humble and you will conquer." He declared himself wholly with us, and had come to our aid, moved by sympathy for us, in the day of our great sorrow.

A telegram which gave great joy to the Assembly was read from a Synod in Germany, over which our great Friend, Rev. Dr. Cav. K. Roenneke was presiding, and this was followed by another from the King of Italy, in reply to our loyal salutations the previous day.

The public meeting of Thursday Evening, 31st of october, presided over by the Rev. Lodovico Conti, pastor in Rome, was a heartmoving sight. On that occasion dear old Parodi of Savona was consecrated as pastor, by the laying on of hands, and three young men, Collosi of Riesi, Petroni of Mottola and Pantaleo of Rome, were set apart solemnly to the office of Evangelist. The Lord's Supper was also dispensed to all the Members of the Assembly and of the Florentine Church, after a stirring sermon by the Rev. L. Conti from I Corinthians II, 28. Oh, how impressive were these moments, when, under the influence of the Spirit of God, we felt the need on the one hand of humbling ourselves on account of our shortcomings and imperfections, as individuals and as a Church, and on the other the need as well of receiving greater grace, greater spiritual energy.

In conclusion, the Lord has been with us. Never has there been so interesting, so edifying an Assembly. You could see in every member the strong resolve to go forward in the name of the Lord. You could feel that our atmosphere had been purified by the tempest. For one who was present for the first time, the deepest impression of all was made by seeing so many Ministers, so many Evangelists, all come out of the Church of Rome, all determined and united in wishing to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified. May the Lord bless our Assembly and grant it the gracious results, for the obtaining of which it was called.

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